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ABSTRACT

This brief presentation describes public relations projects of Dubuque schools to popularize athletics. Among the activities cited which are used to promote community interest in sports events are public school-private school informal matches, talks, swim-a-thons, travel and adventure nights, class banquets with popular speakers, booster clubs, and projects tapping the interest of area businessmen. (CD)

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COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

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COMMUNITY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS

Community and Public Relations is a result of verbal and visual communications. It may either be bright or tarnished. Each of us have little things we do to create good will. Nearly every time I go to a basketball game, the next morning I will write a letter to some fan, telling him how much I appreciate his support of our athletes and program. We help our athletes find summer jobs and scholarship to college. We write letters to parents and visit in their homes, talk to service clubs and keep the news media informed. And I'm sure each of you have many other great ideas to sell your program and its image.

To tell you what we have done in Dubuque should be prefaced by telling you about our community. Dubuque is a community of some 64,000 persons. We have three 4-year high schools with an average enrollment of approximately 2300 students in each school. Two of these high schools are public and the third is a private school. One of the public schools is only 6 years old. The population of our community is about 73% catholic.

For many years prior to 1964 the city fathers and school authorities would not permit competition in contact sports between the private and public schools. Ill feelings had developed within the community, even to the extent of boycotting businesses. When I came to Dubuque in 1948, as head football coach and athletic director, one of the first things I did was to arrange a scrimmage with the private school on Saturday preceeding our first scheduled football game. In talking with the A.D. and football coach from the private school, I was aware that there was some hesitancy and misgivings in agreeing to a scrimmage. I soon found out the reason, but the scrimmage was held at 9:00 a.m. with some 1000 fans in the stadium to see what would happen. It was a good practice and the coaches and player left the field under very friendly conditions. This was the start to friendly normal relations, and after some years it led to friendly rivalry between the factions in our community and close co-operation in future ventures.

Our Board of Education has special meetings each month known as instructional meetings. The purpose is for the Board, and the general public, to become better informed on school operations. Each department, discipline and auxilary areas, from elementary through high school, are required to give reports periodically. Recently our atheltic department had the opportunity to present a fast moving one hour and fifteen minute informative program for one of those monthly meetings.

The high school principal briefly outlined how the athletic program relates to the student body of a high school. A local doctor, and parent of an outstanding athlete, explained how athletics affect the individual child. Goals and objectives of the athletic department were enumerated by the department chairman.

Through charts and over-head projector, the athletic director presented the problems of athletic financing. A live model donned a football uniform piece-by-piece with the price of each piece of equipment flashed upon the screen - an effective illustrative method to show high costs of equipment.

The basketball coach stressed the commitments young men and women must make for excellence in athletics. An average player (not a star) presented a moving talk on what an athlete puts into athletics and what athletics means to him. (This presentation stole the show). The football coach discussed his very positive coaches philosophy.

The athletic director concluded the program with a brief look into the future concerning possible expansion of programs and other problems to be concerned with.

The finale, with a musical background, showed what it is all about, our students. A uniformed model in all sports from both high schools marched onto the stage to the applause of the entire audience.

Previously, I mentioned that renewed athletic competition between the public and private schools led to closer co-operation in future endeavors. As an example: Our new high school has a beautiful 8 lane pool. It is the only pool available for all three schools in our city. We wanted an electronic timing device for our pool. Officers from our three high school Booster Clubs were called together. The problem was placed before them. They jointly agreed to help sponsor the purchase of such a device. A swim-a-thon was staged by the swim teams from all three schools. Through the joint co-operation of the swim teams and the booster clubs funds were raised in a very short period and the timing device is now enjoyed by all three schools.

There is a certain segment of the community that is not reached through athletics. Without contacting these people, they are not likely to give active support to your athletic program. About 14 years ago, our letterman club was persuaded to sponsor a Travelogue Series. Each fall the young athletes from our schools call on homes in their neighborhood to purchase tickets for these programs. These young people are perhaps the first and only contact many individuals in our community has with athletics. Their contact can be positive or negative. We try to be sure it is positive. These young people do a find job. Seven times a year our auditorium is filled for our Travel and Adventure programs. Possibly 90% of our Travelogue fans are people that never attend an athletic event. Each night they come to our auditorium, they see young men and women athletes, well groomed and mannered, serving as ticket takers, ushers, etc. We think this is good public relations, and in addition it adds considerable money to our coffer.

This last fall, we tried a new adventure in public relations. Our exposure was limited, but I think the results are far reaching. We wanted to kick-off our school year with something new and decided on a first class banquet. Honored guests were the entire coaching staff, administration, and Board of Education members, as well as the wives or husbands of all guests. Finances would not permit such an undertaking to be paid from our athletic department funds. The A.D. made contacts in the business community and raised over \$2,000.00 to pay the costs of some 200 guests.

An outstanding nationally known figure and Fellowship of Christian Athlete leader was our featured speaker. His inspirational message, stressed moral, spiritual, patriotic, and clean living, (all virtues we like to associate with athletics). His message was topped only by his closing prayer that left all in attendance spellbound. This was a side of athletics that many, such as Board members and wives had not known. We hope too, that his message may be reflected through coaches to their young athletes and help them become better citizens.

Our most current adventure in co-operation between the Booster clubs of our three high schools, is one that will most likely be best known and recognized for its public relations. Our joint project first began in the fall of 1970. We have one public high school stadium in Dubuque that is used by all three high schools for their home football games.

Some 35 football games are played each fall in that stadium. You can guess the condition of the field with that much usage and the usual Iowa fall weather.

A non-profit Turf Booster organization was formed. A well known local athlete and graduate of the Pro-league was chosen President of our Turf Boosters Association. The presidents of our three high school booster organizations were automatically chosen as the vice-presidents. Some 25 local sports enthusiasts and business leaders were appointed to our Board of Directors. We became incorporated as a non-profit organization and set about to raise funds to install artificial turf on our public school stadium.

About that time much opposition developed by the pro football players association for artificial turr. This cooled support for our drive and our Turf Booster organization was held in limbo for some time. We continued to meet periodically to keep our non-profit corporation in tact and to discuss alternatives. Our playing field problem remained.

A little more than a year ago, we investigated the Prescription Athletic Turf, known as the PAT system for installation on our field. The preliminary investigation was encouraging. This last fall, we had a special meeting of our Turf Boosters and invited top business and industry leaders to a luncheon. We presented our problems and history of our project to those in attendance. We offered a solution and had a representative of the PAT system on hand to give a formal slide presentation and to answer questions.

The president of our Turf Association asked those in attendance if they thought our problem was real. If they concurred do you think this is the time for a fund raising campaign and would they be willing to contribute adequately so that the campaign would be successful. The response was affirmative in all categories.

At this time the campaign is drawing to a close and the results have assured the successful conclusion. We expect to have the new Turf installed and ready for the opening of the football season in September 1976.

Once the installation is completed, it will be a visual positive proof of how co-operation, good will, communication, understanding, and sharing has contributed for the benefit of community relations and a much improved environment both on the playing field and off for our young people.

I am sure each of you have heard and read many articles on public relations. I am sure I could learn much from each of you on public relations. I have tried to give you a few examples of how our athletic department has tried to stimulate a good public image in our community, and also how good public relations have effected our athletic department.

Harold W. Sweet